TRIAL FOR THE MURDER OF THE KING'S ENGLISH

BY

JULIA E. PARK

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Franklin, Ohio

Trial for the Murder of the King's English

By JULIA E. PARK.

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ELDRIDGE ENTERTAINMENT HOUSE
FRANKLIN, OHIO - DENVER, COLO.

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Cast of Characters

Judge—Society.
Solicitor—Mr. Improvement
Sheriff—Mr. Better Speech
Lawyer for the Defense—Miss Carelessness
Circuit Clerk
Stenographer
The Accused

Jurors:
- Merchant
- Farmer
- Banker
- Doctor
- Telephone Girl
- Music Teacher
- Soldier
- Housewife
- Clerk
- Expression Teacher
- Nurse
- Conductor

Witnesses for State:
- Mr. Know All
- Miss Precise
- Old Lady Gossip
- Mr. Inquiry
- Mr. Intelligent

Witnesses for Defense:
- Miss Don't Care
- Mr. Smart Aleck
- Mr. Know Nothing
- Miss Blabmouth

Costumes

Judge Society should wear a judge's gown if possible.

Solicitor should be dressed in business suit.

Sheriff should wear ordinary business suit, with sheriff's badge.

Miss Carelessness should be dressed in a black waist, white skirt, shoes with run-over heels. Her hair should be almost down. A rather masculine girl should be selected for this part and her clothes, walk and speech should be careless.

Circuit Clerk requires no special costume.

Stenographer, if a girl, should wear simple business suit.

The accused should be careless and slouchy in dress, walk, and manner of sitting, for a person who is careless in speech is generally careless in every other way.

The jurors should be dressed in a manner typical of their various professions.

Mr. Know All wears a business suit. His manner should be confident.

Miss Precise may be dressed as a precise old maid, who wears rainbow colors. Her clothes and hair are arranged "just so."

Old Lady Gossip should be a middle-aged woman, rather heavy set.

Mr. Inquiry and Mr. Intelligent should be well dressed.

Miss Don't Care should be slovenly in every way.

Mr. Smart Aleck should be neatly, but rather loudly, dressed.

Mr. Know Nothing should be carelessly dressed.

Miss Blabmouth, any costume for middle-aged woman.

Trial for the Murder of the King's English.

Scene—Court room.

Sheriff—(calls) Oh, yes! Oh, yes! This honorable circuit court has now opened according to law. *(Enter people from all directions. After the people are in the room the judge raps on desk.)*

Judge—Jury now come forward. *(Jurors come forward)* The case on docket is "Trial for the murder of the King's English.

Circuit Clerk—Do you and each of you solemnly swear that you will and truly, by all issues execute all writs of injury which may be submitted to you during the present week, so help you Shakespeare?

Jurors—(holding up right hands) We do. *(Sit.)*

Judge—Is the defendant ready for trial?

Defendant—Yes.

Judge—Is the state ready for trial?

Solicitor—We are.

Solicitor—Sheriff, call in the first witness.

Sheriff—Mr. Know All, come forward.

(Enter Know All.)

Circuit Clerk—(swearing witness) Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you may give in this case will be the truth and nothing but the truth, so help you Robert Browning?

Mr. Know All—I do.

Solicitor—Well, Mr. Know All, what do you know about this case?

Mr. Know All—I know all about it. I heard the accused say "I have eat peas when they was so hard you could shoot them against the wall and they wouldn't bust."

Solicitor—Where did you hear him say it?

Know All—Down at the Dormitory.

Solicitor—To whom was he talking?

Know All—Coach Robertson.

Solicitor—What did Coach Robertson say?

Mr. Know All—He said, "Them peas are in the same class as your head."

Solicitor—That will do, Mr. Know All. *(To council for defense)* You may have the witness.

Miss Carelessness—State yore name to the court.

Know All—Mr. Know All.

Miss C.—Are you sure it wasn't nobody else said it?

Know All—Yes.

Miss C.—Now, really, don't you think he said it for fun?

Solicitor—I object.

Judge—Objection sustained.

Miss C.—Who'd you say he wuz talkin' to?

Mr. Know All—Coach Robertson.

Miss C.—Well, that's all.

(Exit Know All.)

Sheriff—We will now examine Miss Precise.

(Enter Miss Precise.)

Clerk—(swears witness) Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you may give in this case will be the truth and nothing but the truth, so help you Laura Jean Libby?

Miss Precise—I do.

Solicitor—State your name to the court.

Miss Precise—Miss Precise.

Solicitor—Miss Precise, what do you know of the accused?

Miss Precise—I know nothing of him except the errors in grammar which he makes. I have heard them to my utter disgust. I think it a perfect outrage to have a refined young lady like myself come to this horrible court room.

Solicitor—We do not want to know what you think about this case but we wish to know what you know about it.

Miss Precise—But I think—I mean I know it is perfectly absurd. All I know about it is that the telephone girl told me she heard the accused say: "them there Germans need more taters."

Solicitor—Do you for a fact know that this statement is true?

Miss Precise—To be sure I do. I would not have told it if I had not known it to be true as I am not fond of telling falsehoods.

Solicitor—That will do, Miss Precise.

(Miss Precise is now examined by Miss C.)

Miss C.—State yore name to the court.

Miss Precise—Miss Precise.

Miss C.—Did you say that telephone gal told you that this here criminal said "them Germans needed more taters"?

Miss Precise—I said the telephone girl told me.

Miss C.—And you didn't hear it yourself?

Miss Precise—I did not.

Miss C.—That will do Miss Precise.

(Exit Miss Precise.)

Solicitor—Sheriff, call Mr. Inquiry.

Sheriff—Mr. Inquiry, step forward.

Clerk—(swears witness) Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you may give in this case will be the truth and nothing but the truth, so help you Conan Doyle?

Mr. I.—I do.

Solicitor—This is Mr. Inquiry, is it not?

Mr. I—Yes, that's my name. Don't you know me?

Solicitor—I am sorry to say I do not. We will now proceed with the case. Mr. Inquiry, what do you know about this case?

Mr. I.—First, I would like to inquire about this case. Now all I know about it is what I found out. I asked Tom Green if he heard the accused say, "I seen Shabby Allen a-talking to my gal."

Solicitor—Is that all you know about this case?

Mr. I.—Yes, that's all I know about this case but I couldn't tell all I know about the others for it would take me too long.

Solicitor—That will do; you may have the witness.

Miss C.—State yore name to the court.

Mr. I.—Mr. Inquiry.

Miss C.—Now, let me see. Didn't you say you asked Tom Green if he heard this here criminal say that stuff about talking about Shabby Allen's gal?

Mr. I.—I did.

Miss C.—Then you didn't hear him say it, hisself?

Mr. I.—No, I didn't hear him say it, and I only inquired about this case.

Miss C.—If that's the case you may go, Mr. Inquiry.

(Exit Mr. Inquiry)

Solicitor—Sheriff, call Old Lady Gossip.

Sheriff—Old Lady Gossip, come forward.

(Enter Old Lady Gossip)

Clerk—(swears witness) Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you may give in this case will be the truth and nothing but the truth, so help you Lord Bacon?

Old Lady Gossip—I do.

Solicitor—Is this Old Lady Gossip?

O. L. G.—To be sure it is I.

Solicitor—What do you know about this case? Have you ever heard the accused say anything?

O. L. G.—Well, I didn't hear him say it myself, but I was calling on Mrs. Jones a few days ago and she was a-telling me that Mrs. Smith said that Mrs. White told her that Mrs. Johnson told her that her husband called the accused over the telephone and he said, "It is me," and she also told me that her son John said that Willie Smith heard the accused say, "I seen Shabby Allen talking to my gal."

Solicitor—I guess you have told us all you *know* now.

O. L. G.—Yes, I believe so. But wait a minute. I do know something else. Lizzie Mae Jones told me that Jemima Higgins said she heard him say it too.

Solicitor—Very well, Old Lady Gossip. That will do for you.

O. L. G.—It might as well do, for I have told all I heard.

Solicitor—*(to Miss C.)* You may have the witness.

Miss C.—State yore name to the court.

O. L. G.—Old Lady Gossip.

Miss C.—You wuz told all you know about this case, wuzzent you?

O. L. G.—Yes. As I said, Mrs. Smith told me that Mrs. Jones told her——

Miss C.—Don't start all that over. That is enough of you.

(Exit O. L. G.)

Solicitor—Sheriff, we shall hear the testimony of Mr. Intelligent.

Sheriff—Mr. Intelligent, come forward.

Clerk—(swearing witness) Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you may give in this case will be the truth and nothing but the truth, so help you Geoffrey Chaucer.

Mr. Intelligent.—I do.

Solicitor—Is this Mr. Intelligent?

Intelligent—Certainly.

Solicitor—Well, what do you know about this case?

Intelligent—I heard the accused say, "John Roberts' son run home giving Mr. Caldwell heel dust."

Solicitor—Where were you when you heard him say it?

Intelligent—Over at Rat Aldibnontifostiformiasticus.

Solicitor—You are quite sure you heard him yourself?

Intelligent—I suppose so or I'd never have told it.

Solicitor—That will do, Mr. Intelligent. *(To Miss C.)* You may have the witness.

Miss C.—Yore name is Mr. Intelligent?

Intelligent—It is.

Miss C.—Are you sure this was the person who were talking?

Intelligent—I am quite sure this is the person who was talking.

Miss C.—Well, you can go, if you're that sure.

(Exit Mr. Intelligent.)

Miss C.—We will now examine the defendant's witnesses. Sheriff, call Mr. Know Nothing.

Sheriff—Mr. Know Nothing, come forward.

(Enter Mr. Know Nothing, looking like an idiot with mouth open.)

Clerk—(swearing witness) Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you may give in this case will be the truth and nothing but the truth, so help you Jack London?

Mr. K. N.—Uh huh.

Miss C.—State yore name to the court.

Mr. K. N.—Mr. Know Nothing.

Miss C.—What does you know about this here case?

Mr. K. N.—I don't know nothing much. I did hear somebody say he said all this but I never knowed him to only he did say at the Dormitory "I have eat peas when they was so hard you could shoot them against the wall and they wouldn't bust."

Miss C.—That are all you heard, were it?

Mr. K. N.—I don't know. Well, yes, I guess it is.

Miss C.—You might go, Mr. Know Nothing. You take the witness, Mr. State.

Solicitor—You are sure you heard him say these things are you?

Mr. K. N.—I reckon so.

Solicitor—You may go. There's no one home.

(Exit Mr. Know Nothing)

Miss C.—Sheriff, call Miss Don't Care.

Sheriff—Miss Don't Care come to the witness stand.

(Enter Miss Don't Care, acting and walking her name.)

Clerk—(swears witness) Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you may give in this case will be the truth and nothing but the truth, so help you Robert Chambers.

Miss D. C.—Sure I do.

Miss C.—State yore name to the court.

Miss D. C.—Miss Don't Care.

Miss C.—Let's hear yore testimony in this case.

Miss D. C.—I don't see a bit of use in having me in it. But I'll tell you all I know. As I was passing the accused and Jimmie Sanders on the street the other day I heard the accused say, "John Robertson run home giving Caldwell heel dust."

Miss C.—Are you shore it wuz him?

Miss D. C.—Yes, I'm shore. I've seen him before, haven't I?

Miss C.—Well, I'm through with that hussy. *(To Solicitor)* You may have the witness.

Solicitor—Who told you this?

Miss D. C.—I said I heard it myself.

Solicitor—You are sure it was the accused, are you?

Miss D. C.—Yes.

Solicitor—You may go.

(Exit Miss Don't Care.)

Miss C.—Sheriff, call Mr. Smart Aleck.

Sheriff—Mr. Smart Aleck, come forward.

(Enter Smart Aleck.)

Clerk—*(swears witness)* Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you may give in this case will be the truth and nothing but the truth, so help you Elsie Dinsmore?

Mr. Smart A.—That's me.

Miss C.—State yore name to the court.

Mr. Smart A.—Mr. Aleck Smart or Smart Aleck.

Miss C.—Mr. Smart Aleck, what does you know about this case?

Smart A.—I heard the accused say, "them there Germans needs more taters."

Miss C.—What else did you hear him say?

Smart A.—Nothing but I lost my——

Miss C.—Lost what?

Smart A.—Lost my tater.

Miss C.—That will do for you. *(To Solicitor)* You may have the witness.

Solicitor—What did you say you heard the accused say?

Smart A.—That "them thar Germans need more taters."

Solicitor—Where were you when you heard him say this?

Smart A.—Down at the Palace.

Solicitor—To whom was he talking?

Smart A.—To Jimmie Sanders.

Solicitor—What did Jimmie say?

Smart A.—He said he guessed their taters were all tatters now.

Solicitor—That will do for you, Mr. Smart Aleck.

(Exit Mr. Smart Aleck)

Miss C.—We will now hear Miss Blabmouth.

Sheriff—Miss Blabmouth, come forward.

(Enter Miss Blabmouth, muttering something about "hit being a shame for having a nice innocent boy there."

Clerk—(swears witness) Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you may give will be the truth and nothing but the truth, so help you Mr. Longfellow?

Miss Blabmouth—Yes, sir, I can certainly swear that.

Miss C.—State yore name to the court.

Miss B.—Miss Blabmouth. *(Very angrily)* Yes, Miss Blabmouth. Ain't that who that thar sheriff man called?

Miss C.—Yes, he called Miss Blabmouth. What can you tell us of this case?

Miss B.—I don't know nothin' about this case 'cept it's a shame fer a having a pore boy like this up here and you will never get forgiveness fer it.

Miss C.—Tell us something of the accused's character.

Miss B.—I give you to understand I don't know anything about his kerecter.

Miss C.—Didn't you always find him to be a good boy, who didn't bother nobody?

Miss B.—I shore did.

Miss C.—That will do. *(To Solicitor)* You may have the witness.

Solicitor—Miss Blabmouth, you did hear the accused say these things of which he is accused?

Miss B.—Well, I did hear him say he seen John Robertson run home giving Mr. Caldwell heel dust, but this is a free country and I spose he can say what he wants to.

Solicitor—Very well, Miss Blabmouth, that will do.

(Exit Miss Blabmouth, angrily.)

Miss C.—*(arising and addressing the court)* Yore honor, the court, ladies and gentlemen of the jury: First the charge against this pore boy for saying "It is me," is valid for Dr. Latham, De-On Allford Fessor Bain, Mr. Ste-all and even Shakespeare defends this statement. They justify such expressions as "It is me," from the analogy of the French "c'est moi" and on ground that they are more frequently he-ard than the pur-scription forum. Me stands fur the person speaking any way, so why not let him make use of sich? Second: We will now consider the expression, "I seen Shabby Allen talking to my gal." Well the principal parts of the verb "see" is: present see, past indicative seen, past participle saw. So ye see that he ain't wrong. Third: Well, fur that expression, "I heard them Germans need more taters," I bet, well I *know* they does need more taters, and if not now, it won't be long. This expression is so often said or used I does honestly believe it has came into use, fur let me mention jist here a few—well—a number of good authorities that have used and are still using same: Ruth Smith, Sally Jones, Jimmy Fairbank, Pete Hill, Mary Jane Emerine Scruggins, Grady Forever, Johnny Longlegs. Probably this expression is what we call a localism or provincialism. Does you ladies and gentlemen of the jury know what a localism are? Well a localism are an expression that am peculiar to a particular part of the country. Don't us and each of we live in a particular part of the country where this expression are used? So, ain't it right? He wants justice! Justice he

must have! He ain't able to sarve in the plenipotentiary nor he ain't got no money fur to give away fur—er—nothing. If you hang him that would be worse than everthing else. That would not be religious but a sin for all of you'ens know—well, the ones that would break one of the fifteen, twenty—or some number of the commendints has not read their textbooks. Some of these here witnesses am coming up here 'cusing this pore boy for things what they don't know nothing about. Give him justice and he will be allowed to talk like he wants to in his own free United States. *(Miss C. drops into her chair.)*

Solicitor—(to the jury.) Your honor, the court, Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury: From the testimonies given by these various witnesses we find the defendant accused of saying: "have eat," for "have eaten," "they was" for "they were," "bust" for "burst." "them there" for "those," "it is me" for "it is I," "seen" for "saw," "run" for "ran," and "taters" for "potatoes." We will now discuss these charges. First, "have eat." Emerson and Bender, Sanford and Brown and H. G. Buehler say that the principal parts of the verb "eat" are, present eat, past ate, and past participle eaten, and that the present perfect tense is formed by adding "have" or "has" to the past participle and therefore it would be "have eaten" instead of "have eat." Second, "they was." Sanford and Brown, Emerson and Bender, and H. G. Buehler say the verb has two numbers, singular and plural. 1st, 2nd and 3rd, and that the general rule is that a singular subject requires a singular verb and a plural subject requires a plural verb. Then, since "they" is plural a plural verb should be used, and therefore it should be "they were" instead of "they was." Third, "bust." H. G. Buehler, Sanford and Brown, and Emerson and Bender say that the principal parts of the verb "burst" are present burst, past burst, and past participle burst. And "burst" is never used for "bust." "Bust," so Webster says, means the chest or a piece of sculpture. When used for "burst," which means to ex-

plode, it is vulgar and slang. He should not have said "bust" but "burst." Fourth, "them there." "Them" is used in this sentence as the modifier of the noun "Germans." Sanford and Brown say, "Them should never be used as a modifier. The demonstrative pronoun, "those" should be used because only an adjective modifies nouns and pronouns. H. G. Buehler and Emerson and Bender agree also on this so he should have said "those" instead of "them there." Fifth, "It is me." "Me" is never used in the nominative case, so Sanford and Brown say. They also state that it always takes a predicate nominative. Therefore "me" is incorrect in this sentence and it should be "It is I." Other authorities agree on this so it is incorrect to say "It is me." Sixth, "seen." Sanford and Brown, H. G. Buehler, and Emerson and Bender say, the principal parts of the verb "see" are present, see; past, saw; and past participle, seen. They say, too, that when "seen" is used some form of the verb "be" must be used. It should either be "saw" or "have seen." Seventh, "run." These men say the principal parts of "run" are, present, run; past, ran; and past participle, run. "Run" is used only in the present tense or with the past participle. When used in the past tense as this, it should be "ran." Eighth, "taters." Webster's unabridged dictionary says p, o, t, a, t, o, e, s spells potatoes, not "taters." Clippinger's Composition and Rhetoric says "taters" is not a localism, but is slang and a vulgarism. Free speech is free until it interferes with our neighbors. Our language has decidedly an influence over our neighbors, reflects upon our family and our teachers, and classifies the person who uses it either as ignorant or cultured. We appeal to you, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, to protect the English language by meting out just punishment to this murderer of the King's English. *(sits down.)*

Judge—(dismisses jury with following speech) Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury: You are called upon to make a decision whether or not it is proper to use these various words for which the state or Mr. Improve-

ment has the accused on trial. Ladies and Gentlemen, you have heard the witnesses on both sides testify as to the use of the words, "seen" for "saw," "run" for "ran," "them" for "those," and "me" for "I." Now, Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, if you are convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant really used these words and that they were wrongly used, it is your duty to find the defendant guilty and to fix as his penalty a positive demand that his teachers, parents and classmates never allow him to murder the King's English again. Furthermore his penalty should require that he study English for two hours every day for two years, under a special tutor. Now, Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, if you find the defendant has been wrongly accused, as Miss Carelessness has attempted to prove, you may find him not guilty. Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury, you may now retire to make your decision.

(The jury retires and the court anxiously awaits the verdict. The defendant looks hopeless. After about one minute deliberation, the jury enters.)

Foreman—We, the members of the jury, find the defendant guilty.

Judge—You have heard the verdict and you know the penalty. Is there a motion for adjournment?

A Juror—I move you we adjourn.

Another Juror—I second that motion.

Judge—All who are in favor of adjourning may let it be known by rising.

(Court adjourns. Accused is led out by the sheriff.)

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